

## anything you can do (i can do better)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/37422313) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/37422313>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Video Blogging RPF</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Clay   Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Character:	<a href="#">GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Clay   Dream (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Karl Jacobs</a> , <a href="#">Alexis   Quackity</a> , <a href="#">Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">moon fics :)</a>
Language:	English
Collections:	<a href="#">VDAY FIC EXCHANGE 2022</a>
Stats:	Published: 2022-02-27 Words: 17294

## anything you can do (i can do better)

by [orphan\\_account](#)

### Summary

George wishes the sun had exploded into some sort of supernova when Dream finally walks in.

It isn't so bad for the first thirty seconds, where George can just barely hear his voice greeting others in the class, the apology that easily slips out when he bumps into someone, and there is the slight squeak of the chair being pulled, and then suddenly—

“Oh.” There's disapproval in his voice, and George can hardly hold back a visible frown. “You're here.”

In the four years of high school that they've known each other, Dream and George have always competed to be the best.

Things get tricky, however, when they're paired up to work on the same group project.

### Notes

disclaimer: if anyone in this fic expresses any discomfort to being in it, i will gladly delete this and also myself

additional disclaimer: i dont know anything about sports and . there is some sports talk so if i get Any small detail incorrect please dismiss it i am so sorry

hello hi lilac my beloved i treasure u so much i hope u like this and i did the academic to lovers trope justice !! i hope u enjoy this very much :D

thank u 2 my snookums [ari](#) for beta-ing this fic ily !!! ok byebye

>[if u would like to listen to the playlist](#)

happy reading!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

George has never particularly considered himself a drastic person.

Despite being somewhat ridiculous at times, he can count on one hand the exact amount of times he has acted irrationally towards certain situations. He's always assumed himself to be a fairly reasonable person, with reasonable reactions to reasonable obstacles in his life. In the many years he has been alive, George can consider himself a quite rational person.

With this in mind, George is on the brink of jumping out the nearest window.

"I'm going to die," he says, placing down his lunch tray, and Karl barely has time to open his mouth before George repeats, with certain emphasis, "I am going to *die*."

Death would be a better fate than this, he knows it. Anything would be better than this. He would rather relive the entirety of 2009 than this. He would choose hiking in the Himalayas over this. He would prefer Quackity beating him with a tricycle than this.

Karl blinks once, twice, until he returns, "It's nice to see you, too, George. I'm doing good, my day has been great so far, how about you?"

"I saw you an hour ago," George responds, despair in his bones. "I'm skipping the pleasantries. I'm about to die."

"You know," Karl begins, unwrapping a fork, "I just don't think that's true."

George pays him no mind, because of course Karl wouldn't understand; he's never had experience having a mortal enemy, much less an enemy who attends the same school as him, and now, because of some horrible, horrible upper being, George now has to work on a group project with *him*.

It had all begun exactly twenty-three minutes ago, when George had briefly felt his soul leave his body as his English teacher announced the first group project of the year.

Now, George has never been a *bad* team player, especially not with a common goal in mind. In fact, he would consider himself a pretty reliable member of any group, and, in some situations, even prefers to work with others.

This being said, George would rather canoe across the Atlantic Ocean than work on a group project with *him*.

"Okay, well, I don't know why you're referring to him like a Marvel supervillain," Karl says, "but it can't be that bad." He takes a bite of his atrocious salad, half of the contents that should definitely not belong in the same bowl as lettuce, and chews for a few seconds. "What's even the issue? You just have to do a presentation together?"

"Shut up," George threw a straw wrapper at him, "let me finish."

Although it was barely eleven a.m., sleepiness still wearing at George's body, he felt every atom in him suddenly hum with hatred when George had walked into the room and spotted *him* sitting a few rows away from George's own seat.

It had been a horror, on the first day of school, to walk into his third period and halt at the sight of *him*— his annoying, tall, football-playing, too-big-for-the-school-desks self, sitting in his English class, surrounded by his equally annoying, tall, football-playing, too-big-for-the-school-desks friends.

George had nearly turned on his heel and walked out of the building, his diploma forgotten. No diploma was worth dealing with *him* at eleven a.m. in the morning.

It seemed that the universe was feeling particularly sadistic on this specific Wednesday, however, as George's torture did not end there— no, not at all. Instead, it only continued as fifty-seven years old Mr. Germe had decided to take it upon himself to assign partners together for this assignment.

There was no amount of sympathy that could ever portray the utter dread that had racked George, from head to toe, as he watched his teacher slowly read through his list, "Allison and Leah, Jane and William, George and—"

*Anyone but him* he had thought, and George has never considered himself a religious person, but he found himself praying for the first time in five years in his English Literature and Composition class, *anyone but him, anyone but him.*

"— Dream."

If there was a god, they were cruel and unjust and laughing at George.

"Don't you think," Karl butts in, "you're exaggerating? Just a little?"

"A three-week long group project," George complains, and the juice box in his hand threatens to explode, "with him. With *him*."

*Him*, of course, being the bane of his existence— *Dream*.

Dream, who is, perhaps, the most insufferable, smug, and competitive person on the planet.

He is the caricature of the perfect high schooler; easy-going towards anyone who isn't George, a casual flirt, so good at his classes that all the teachers were quite fond of him, and one would think the entire school was in love with him, with the exception of George.

Perhaps it is because of their rivalry.

In their mutual streak of stubbornness, competitiveness, and inability to admit defeat or failure that now pits them against each other, their unsaid competition for every class they share is a known thing.

George cannot recall a time when they had not competed to be better than each other, to be the best, to always be at least a point higher than the other. It's a priority of sorts, to come out with a better grade than Dream, and have the ability to rub it in his face.

George barely remembers how such a rivalry began.

He'd bet it was Dream's fault, like most things usually are.

Some might think their rivalry a good thing, a motivator to do well in school, and George would only agree for the fact that he has always performed better with competition, especially when there was a reason to be better, and Dream was the perfect reason— to be better than the most picture-perfect man in this school.

George can't stand anything about the other man.

He hates Dream's easy charm, his likability and niceness towards everyone else, his confidence just a little too much to brush off. George doesn't know how anyone can stand him.

It does not help the fact of him also being a football player, arrogantly parading around with his stupid varsity jacket, always a little too loud in the hallways with his football player friends, and George would almost assume Dream to be as stupid as the rest of them, if not for Dream being good enough to keep up with him.

And now, George would have to work with the most infuriating man known to humanity for the next three weeks.

"I'm dropping out," he suddenly decides, eyes wide as he sits up straight. "I'm— I don't *need* a high school diploma. I can just live on the streets."

"Don't be dumb," Karl rolls his eyes. "It's not that bad. It's just three weeks."

"*Three weeks*," George barely refrains from wailing, and instead drops forward and onto the table. He groans, loud and drawn out, and he'd be embarrassed by the six different students who turn to look at him, but he's lost all dignity at this point. He has nothing to lose.

A muffled *thud* follows, the sound of a backpack hitting the lunch table, and someone's elbow bumps into his shoulder as they take a seat next to him.

"Why the fuck is George acting like a little baby?"

George groans even louder at the sound of Quackity's voice, and Karl ignores him to greet, "What's up?"

"Nothing much," he replies easily, leaning over and swiping George's apple from his tray. A crunch follows, and he says through a full mouth, "Stayed back to make up a test from yesterday. Nice sweater."

Karl's smile is evident in his voice when he responds, "You think so?"

"Yeah," Quackity swallows a chunk of apple, "the blue really brings out your eyes."

"Hey, man," George is sure Karl would be hugging Quackity, if not for the table between them, "thanks. That means a lot."

"No problem, I was—" George groans again, loud, and Quackity sighs as he asks, once again, "What's his problem?"

"He's upset because he got paired up to work on a project with *him*," Karl elaborates, and George raises his head to watch Quackity raise an eyebrow.

"Him?" Quackity leans over to grab his sandwich, and George lets it happen. He's almost certain the turkey meat in the sandwich isn't turkey. Or meat. "Who?"

"Who do you think," George answers, miffed. There's no one else in this wretched building that causes him such distress. He's never met someone with such evil in their heart, such malice and hate in everything they do, every move intent on causing as much misery.

Quackity stares at him, before it clicks. "Do you mean—"

George presses a hand over Quackity's mouth. He glares as he hisses, "Don't say his *name*, are you insane?" He yelps when Quackity licks at his palm, and wipes his saliva on Quackity's sleeve. "You're disgusting."

"He's not some sort of evil antagonist, George," Karl rolls his eyes. "He's an eighteen year-old white boy, not fucking- *Voldemort*."

Quackity nods, taking a bite of his sandwich. "Yeah, you're acting like he killed your parents or something."

"He might as well have," George says darkly.

Karl and Quackity pay him no mind. "I get that he's, like, a complete Chad," Karl continues, and Quackity nods. "Like, the biggest portrayal of an American teenager. The most stereotypical frat boy, except we're in high school and none of us have ever attended college," he takes a second to stab a few cucumbers onto his fork, "but he isn't that bad."

George stares at him. "You're blind."

"Maybe you're just seeing things that aren't there," Karl suggests.

"This is true," Quackity nods. "Why are you, as a man, looking at another man?"

"Please shut up," George nearly begs, and feels another pang of despair echo throughout his body as the bell rings shortly after, dismissing lunch. "I'm going to die," he says again, because his next class is full of science and is so utterly long, it drains all the will to live out of him.

"You'll be fine," Karl pats him on the shoulder as they begin walking, and George nearly topples over. "It's not the end of the world."

George wishes it was the end of the world.

It would save him the misery he feels when he steps into class the next day, and he vaguely wonders if there's emotional repercussions to being paired up with his mortal enemy to work together in his most hated class. Maybe he could sue for emotional distress.

Unfortunately, the world does not implode in on itself when George looks around and finds a seat in the newly-arranged desk formations, made for students to sit with their partners. They've all been paired, with two desks pushed together and into neat rows lining the room.

He takes a seat in a randomly placed desk, rapt attention on his phone as he attempts to seem as sane and composed as one can be while being arranged to work with their sworn enemy.

George wishes the sun had exploded into some sort of supernova when Dream finally walks in.

It isn't so bad for the first thirty seconds, where George can just barely hear *his* voice greeting others in the class, the apology that easily slips out when he bumps into someone, and there is the slight squeak of the chair being pulled, and then suddenly—

"Oh." There's disapproval in his voice, and George can hardly hold back a visible frown. "You're here."

George tries to remember the meditation tactics he had once read on some self-help Instagram

account. *Breathe in for seven seconds*, he recalls. George can barely breathe in at all.

"It's almost like," he replies, on the verge of simply walking out the room, "I was also here yesterday."

The corner of Dream's mouth quirks upward. "I was hoping you wouldn't return."

"I hope you break your knee again, tonight," George says, voice flat as the words leave his mouth, and it would be harsh, if this wasn't a regular occurrence. It's tradition, at this point, to wish bad luck on each of Dream's games.

"*Ouch*," Dream exclaims, clutching at the left side of his chest, "Georgie, you don't really mean that, do you?"

"Maybe you'll break your skull, too, this time," George adds. "It could be a miracle, where you finally gain some brain cells, since you don't have any more to lose."

Dream's lips are tilted up in an amused smile, and George would like to do the honors of breaking his skull, he thinks. "Harsh. I would invite you to one of our games, but I'm afraid I *would* break a bone. Your face might distract me too much." If it wasn't said so biting, it could have almost been a compliment.

George raises an eyebrow. "I figured you were obsessed with me."

"You're the one who knows the dates to all my games," Dream points out.

"I didn't realize our football team only consisted of you," George retorts, and Dream rolls his eyes.

"You know what I meant."

"Did I," George dryly replies.

Dream leans back in his chair. "Smartass."

"I am quite smart," George nods, and it feels like a third-grade response, but it leads him to ask, because they both have the same class in different hours, and he feels like bragging, "what did you get on the lab yesterday?"

Dream sucks in his cheek as he turns away, looking a little less smug when he mutters, "Eighty-eight."

George presses his lips together, trying to force away his smile. "Okay," he replies, and attempts to return back to his phone, silence following.

This is futile when Dream, fatefully, as one of them always winds up saying, asks, "How about you?"

George can't help but smile. "Ninety-four."

Dream's eyebrows seem to raise even higher, and George holds back a laugh at the sight. "Yeah, fucking right," he scoffs. "Bullshit."

George can barely conceal a smirk. "You'll have to admit that I'm better than you, eventually."

Dream squints at him, refusing to dignify him with a response, and he gives George one last look, before he turns away.

There is a solid feeling of satisfaction in his stomach as George continues on with the rest of the period, like there usually is, in these sort of moments.

He knows that, reasonably, Dream doesn't actually *hate* him— it'd be contradictory to the few times they have been able to joke amongst themselves, or even ask for quick assistance on an assignment.

George himself, well, doesn't *hate* him, either. It's more of a spite thing, really, in the way of both of them always seeking each other out to target, or the competition to just be better than the other. George doesn't *hate* him. Probably. He's pretty sure.

And, anyhow, it's always satisfying when George ends up ranking just a few percentages higher than Dream.

It's a sickly sweet sort of reward to see Dream defeated.

"Dude, I feel bad," Karl expresses, and George rolls his eyes where he sits.

"It's literally not a big deal," he replies. "Go to practice. I'll just chill."

Karl frowns, like he usually does, whenever they're having one of these conversations, and says, "You sure there's not a club or something you can join to keep you entertained?"

"No, thanks," George waves off. "Now, *go*. You'll be late."

Karl stalls for a moment, still frowning, before he sighs and hurries off.

Being someone without a driver's license, and the fact he lives nearly thirty minutes away, it's sensible that George would hitch a ride from Karl, who lives just a block away from George's house. This is a brilliant plan that works out in everyone's favor almost every day.

This plan, however, did not execute so well on the days that Karl has tennis practice, and leads to George sticking around after school hours after it's ended.

This fact is only exaggerated when George is still in school well after it's over, clock ticking close to four p.m. as he waits for Karl to finish up with tennis practice, laying on the ground as time passes.

Reasonably, he doesn't *have* to be on the floor. He could, like most sensible people, spend his time broadening his experiences in life and of high school by joining a club, perhaps leading him to learn new things and socialize with others.

Alas, George after three p.m. is lazy, and has no desire to join any extracurriculars. He continues his adventures on the hallway floor.

Some part of him is almost concerned with the sanitary problems of lying down on the school floors, but the bigger part of him is tired and comfortable enough to brush off these concerns. He'll shower when he gets home, anyway.

George stares up at the ceiling, phone not quite interesting enough, and can feel exhaustion drip out the ceiling tiles and onto his limp body. He can hear the yells and shouts of the practicing team through the heavy metal door of the gym, as well as the squeaking of their shoes. If he tried hard

enough, he'd bet he could point out Karl's voice.

As it is, he's too tired, and instead continues to lay where he is.

Rationally, he doesn't *have* to submit himself to such torture of practically dozing off in the school hallways; the sports teams were always open to be watched during practice, and it's common to stay back and watch their schools' teams play a few practice rounds after school.

Unfortunately, this is also a breeding ground for socializing, and the last time George had gone, he had accidentally made friends with half the cheerleading team and a few dancers. They were all delightful, really, but it's three thirty-eight p.m., and George has had enough with people. He'd rather stay on the hallway ground, where socializing stayed to a minimum.

This thought is coincidentally timed with the sound of steps approaching.

They're heavy, and definitely not Karl, as George has practiced his skill of looking out for the other man without having to raise his head. He's always had sensitive hearing, anyhow, and his keen ears are always first to hear these sorts of things.

The steps, unfortunately, slow down as they approach him, and George lets out a sigh. It seems not even laying down in the hallway would ward off unwanted oncomers.

He barely tilts his head to look up, and pauses at the sight of Dream.

Dream furrows his eyebrows as he peers down at him.

"What're you doing here?"

"What does it matter to you?" George knows it must be a little ridiculous to be speaking with such sharpness, especially when he's on the ground, backpack askew and hair definitely a mess. This does not stop him in any measure.

Hopefully Karl would suddenly rush out of those doors any moment now, hurrying up and out of practice, perhaps recreate a saved-by-the-bell situation. He wonders, if he closed his eyes and pretended to fall asleep, if Dream would leave him be. He's tempted to try it out.

Dream rolls his eyes. "I just meant, why are you still here? It's not like you're ever in any extracurriculars."

George gives him a look. "I didn't know you were so interested in my after-school activities, Dream."

It's easy satisfaction when Dream flushes, and George can't help the slight smile that takes up his lips. "Shut up. Whatever, I didn't mean— whatever," he huffs, straightening as he properly shoulders his backpack. "Bye."

George watches him turn to leave, and he's glad for it, until he remembers.

"Wait," he calls out, unmoving from where he lays, but it's enough, as Dream stills and turns around.

Dream looks lost. "What?"

"I need your number," George says— demands, really, and Dream stares at him, before smiling. Smirking. George wants to throw a boulder at his face.



“Wow, ever so forward, Georgie,” Dream sing-songs, and George cringes. “I didn’t know you felt like this. Of *course* you can have my number.”

George sends him a withering glare. “For the project, you dumbass.”

“I’m so sure,” Dream grins, and George hates the arrogance of it, how easily he has fallen into the trap of being the same as every person Dream teases into being “into him”, no matter how untrue it is.

“Nevermind,” he says, bringing up an arm to cover his face, Dream’s gaze on him too heavy. “You can go fuck yourself, actually.”

“You’d like that,” Dream replies easily, and offers a hand. “Give me your phone.”

George, with great resignation, pulls his phone out his pocket, and hands it to Dream.

It’s a quiet few moments as Dream taps on the screen, before handing it back, looking pleased with himself. George gives him a suspicious look, and looks at his contacts.

***Dream <3***

*(407) 214-5333*

He grimaces when he finds his first text to be a flurry of heart emojis. He looks up at Dream. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Dream says, giving him one last look. George feels oddly exposed, laying on the floor like this, with Dream towering over him. At least he has the reassurance of easy access to breaking Dream’s legs, if need be. “Text me later.”

“No,” George decides, pocketing his phone. The gym is oddly silent now, a sign of practice being over, and he hopes Dream leaves before anyone else turns the corner. He’d like to have them being seen together to a minimum.

“Then I’ll text you,” Dream rolls his eyes. He takes a few steps back, and turns on his heel as he bids, “Bye.”

George doesn’t respond, watching as Dream rolls his car keys between his fingers and heads to the parking lot, hair shining golden in the sunlight, and skin colored warm. George frowns when he realizes he’s staring, and looks away to return to watching the hallway for Karl. It’s nearly four now, it must be.

He glances at the clock.

3:23.

George lets out a long groan.

Sapnap, among all the other footballers, is one of the most tolerable ones, by far.

Maybe it’s because George had met him before Sapnap had joined the football team, when they had been placed to sit next to each other in a shared art class, and, despite his loud friends, Sapnap had been quiet and less sociable than assumed.

George considers him a good study partner, considering both of them were quite diligent in their studies, and, if he ignored most of the *your mom* jokes, he was even funny, from time to time. Being friends with Karl and Quackity, he has accustomed himself to bad humor.

Now, three years later, they're sitting together in the library; it's one many students frequent, the sort even college students often find themselves in, and now he and Sapnap found themselves occupying one of the tables, papers spread out as George tried his best to teach Sapnap physics.

"Can't you just, like, do it for me?" Sapnap pleads, eyes wide as he looks at George.

George *tsk s*, taking a glance at Sapnap's worksheet. "It isn't that bad. You have, like, seventy-five percent of it done. Just take a break and continue."

Sapnap groans across from him, giving into the temptation of a break and flopping over onto the table. His form slouches into the wood, and he inhales deeply, before groaning. George barely looks up from his laptop.

"George." No answer. "*George.*"

"*What,*" George snaps, but it lacks the toxicity he wishes it had when Sapnap looks up.

"Take a break with me. I have nothing to do."

George shakes his head. "Just go on your phone or something."

"I don't *want* to," Sapnap answers, straightening in his seat. "Let's chat, like buddies do."

George wants to bash his head in. Sometimes, Sapnap's status as one of the few, tolerable football players wavered. Nonetheless, he pushes his laptop aside. "What do you want to chat about?"

Sapnap stares at him, before slouching again. "I don't know. Want to talk about guys?"

George did a double take. "What?"

"What?" Sapnap blinks at him, and then, suddenly, brings up, "How's your project going?"

George squints at him. "How do you know about that?"

He shrugs. "Dream mentioned it to me. Talked about you being his partner, and stuff. He's irritated you haven't texted him, yet."

"Oh." George opens his mouth, shaping out words before he settles on saying, "He said he would text me first.", ignoring the way he is still stuck on the fact that Dream talks about him to others.

It's an obvious thing, seeing as Sapnap and Dream are best friends, but still. It made him feel strange, the thought of Dream talking about him to others when George isn't there.

"He talks about me?"

He hopes he doesn't sound too interested. Because he's not.

"I mean, yeah." Sapnap looks too nonchalant about this. "He mentions you pretty often, talks about you being annoying. Also mentioned how much better he is at bio than you. And your 'rivalry'." Sapnap raises quotation marks at it.

George frowns. "He's definitely not better at bio than me. He sucks at labs."

“Uh-huh,” Sapnap replies, not looking very interested.

“I don’t even know why he’s so confident that he’s better at it than I am. I usually get better grades,” George adds. “*And* he always rushes through his tests and forgets to check for small mistakes. It’s unbelievable.”

Sapnap sighs, with the exhaustion of a man who is used to this. “Totally.”

George huffs. “And he’s so arrogant. He barely does better than the class average and assumes he’s better than me. As if he would’ve even *passed* last year’s chemistry without me.”

“God, it’s like talking to the same person,” Sapnap groans, head flopping back onto the table, and George pauses in his rant. “You know what, physics is better than this. Anything is better than this. I’m going back to work.” He sits up and picks up his pencil once more, jotting unintelligible numbers onto his paper.

George frowns, before returning to his laptop. “No need to be so dramatic, Sapnap.”

“I’m going to commit homicide,” Sapnap mutters, and returns to his work.

Karl has another impromptu practice on Monday. George considers walking home. He’d get there faster, no doubt.

He scrolls through mindless videos as George feels his mind slowly melt into a puddle of nonsense, and, although he was just mildly uncomfortable, he feels so tired, he doesn’t think he’ll ever move from this spot on the floor.

He must look strange, sitting horizontal on the floor just outside the gym while other patrons of the school, staff and students alike, pass him with passive glances. Not many teachers pay him any mind, and most of the students that walk past are freshly out of clubs and sports, too tired to care for a man laying on the ground.

Most, being the key word.

It’s nearing the time Karl usually gets out of practice when a shadow suddenly looms over George, and he looks up from where he lays to meet eyes with a girl.

“Um,” he says, and they stare at each other for an uncomfortably long time, until George slowly greets, “Hello.”

“Hi,” she smiles brightly, and then pauses at a proper look at his face. “Hey, wait, I know you! You get into fights with Dream a lot. Greg, right?”

George willed himself not to flush, mostly at the fact that this girl knew him because of *Dream*, of all people, and also the fact she had said his name wrong so confidently. “It’s George.”

“Oh, sorry,” she waves off. “I suck with names.” She tilts her head as she says, “I was wondering if you’d like to join the chess club.”

George blinks once, twice, before inhaling very deeply. “What?”

“Chess club,” she repeats, and takes a few steps back as he sits up. He feels a little disoriented

while he turns to look at her, and she takes the first paper out of the pile in her hands, and offers it to him.

George takes a look at it. "Chess club," he echoes. "Um, okay."

"We'd love to have you around. We have meetings every Thursday," she mentions. Taking his lack of response as apprehension, she adds, "Don't worry, James, you don't have to have prior knowledge of playing chess."

"I know how to play chess," he mumbles, a little too lost to remember to correct her on his name again.

He takes a second to glance over the flier; he had played a lot in his younger years, yet had gone a few years without playing recently. He hadn't even known of their chess club before this, but the thought of having to talk to others, even after school, deters him.

*It's not like you're ever in any extracurriculars*, George recalls Dream saying, coming back to haunt him, and it feels like a challenge, at the moment.

He takes another look at the flier. Perhaps it'd be nice to spend his time doing something fun while waiting for Karl to finish throwing a ball around with a net.

"Well," the girl says, breaking him out of his thoughts, "all the information is on there, if you'd like to consider joining us next week." She offers another smile. "I hope to see you there, Jeremy."

"Okay," George awkwardly responds again, and watches as she walks away, before stopping by another student to hand a flier.

*Chess club*, he thinks. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to join.

"Hey, man," Karl says as he approaches, and George looks up to spot him with dripping wet hair, presumably right out of a shower. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah," George answers, pushing himself off the ground. Karl watches, unquestioning as he folds the paper once, twice, before tucking it into his pocket. "Let's go."

He's got one foot through the door of his house when his phone suddenly buzzes.

George groans, pulling his phone out as he walks to his room. It's presumably Karl, maybe because George forgets his things in Karl's car more often than he'd like to admit.

To his great despair, it is not Karl.

***Dream <3***

*are u free tomorrow*

George can't even escape him at home.

He ignores the well-timed text with the complaints he had given Sapnap yesterday about Dream promising to text first– he can't even begin to feel annoyed at Sapnap for spilling their conversation to Dream, not with the sudden nervousness that overtakes him.

It's just a text, he knows this.

He promptly turns off his phone and tosses it in the general direction of his bed, where it thumps against the mattress and disappears into the covers. He lets out a sigh, and grabs the nearest pair of clean clothes.

He'll deal with it after a thorough shower.

(George, with now mildly damp hair and significantly less nervousness, taps on his phone.

*me*

*Why*

***Dream <3***

*for the project*

George grimaces.

*me*

*I'm free*

*After school*

***Dream <3***

*mine or yours*

*me*

*Yours*

***Dream <3***

*ok*

George sighs and exits out of the conversation. He hadn't expected to feel so jittery from one text.

He stares up at his bedroom's ceiling, before frowning. He rolls over and grabs his phone once more, swiping through his apps and clicking on Dream's contact.

George quickly deletes the heart after Dream's name.)

"Have you," Quackity begins, watching with raised eyes as George hurriedly shoves his supplies into his locker, "tried calming down?"

"Shut up," George replies easily, a slight scowl as he looks at his bulging backpack. "I think I've packed everything— right? I have the book, I think I— should I bring the textbook?" He doesn't wait for an answer as he forcefully pushes it into his backpack. "I should."

Quackity gives him a mildly concerned look. "Dude. You're acting," he makes circular motions to his head, "a little crazy. Loose in the head, as people say. Off the deep end." He thinks. "Loony."

George rolls his eyes. "I'm perfectly sane, I just— need to be prepared." At Quackity's raised eyebrow, he huffs. "I can't show up unprepared. If I do, he'll think I'm irresponsible and probably have my life in shambles, and I can't have that when I *need* to be better than him, or else I'll— I'll *die*."

Quackity blinks once, twice. “I think you’re nuttier than a fruitcake.”

George pauses, making a face. “I feel oddly offended.”

“Good,” Quackity retorts, crossing his arms as George frantically shoves a fistful of papers into his bag. “Seriously, man, you need to chill. It’s just Dream.”

George shakes his head. “Do you know how embarrassing it would be to show up, unprepared? He’s probably going to jump on any chance to ridicule me. I even spent last night coming up with a few ideas for the presentation,” he pulls out a notebook and flips to a page, scribbled with various bullet points.

Quackity presses his lips together, and leans forward to take a closer look. “You mind if I take a quick picture of this?” George rolls his eyes, and shuts his folder, and Quackity lets out a disappointed sigh.

“Shoot me,” George says, reasonably, and zips up his backpack. He groans as he heaves it over his shoulder, struggling to stand up straight. “I have to see him in, like,” he takes a glance at the time, “twelve minutes, holy shit.”

“Shit,” Quackity looks alarmed as he realizes the time, “I promised Karl I’d help him and Tina out with their bake sale thing.” He leans down to pick up his own backpack. “I gotta go. Good luck with your project, give Dream a kiss for me.”

He pats him on the shoulder, and George bats him away. “Fuck off. Bye.”

Quackity waves as he departs, and George inhales deeply, shutting his locker and turning around. Now he’s all alone for the next eleven minutes, until Dream shows up, in all his arrogant, football-playing glory.

He refrains from groaning at just the thought. Maybe he could just drop out.

It shouldn’t feel like such a big deal, but it does; he and Dream have never spent a minute alone, always arguing in the company of others, whether it be in the hallways or a classroom, or even in the bathroom, at some point.

This was not to mention the fact that he’d be going to Dream’s *house*, where he’d be alone and without assistance in dealing with Dream’s dumbassery. He’s half concerned his IQ level might drop during his stay.

George takes his time in getting to the parking lot, where Dream had asked (read: *ordered* ) George to meet him, telling George he’d be giving him a ride, rather than offering. At least it saved the mortification of actually accepting.

He scrolls on his phone as he waits, halfheartedly paying attention to his screen as he anxiously watches the time. Only four minutes have passed. George almost wishes Dream wouldn’t show up at all.

Almost on cue, a loud voice calls, “George!”

He looks up to see Sapnap waving enthusiastically, a grin on his face as he catches George’s eye. Dream walks beside him, tucking his phone away. He looks up at the sound of George’s name, and he raises a hand to wave as well.

George scrunches his nose, no reply while they make their way to him across the hall. He shuts off

his phone, and the wait is only a few seconds for them to be within talking distance, yet it sets him nervous.

“Hi,” he says blandly, no joy in his voice as Sapnap crowds close to throw an arm around his shoulders. It takes all his strength not to throw him off.

“Fancy seeing you here,” Sapnap notes, wiggling his eyebrows, and this time, George does not resist when he elbows Sapnap in the stomach. “*Fuck*,” he expresses as he lets go.

Dream lets out an amused laugh. “What’d you expect?”

“Well,” Sapnap sniffs, straightening, “unlike you two, me and George are actually friends. Best friends, really. We plan on getting matching tattoos.”

“Really,” Dream questions, unconvinced as his eyes flicker between the two.

“We do not,” George balked. “I don’t even know who you are.”

Sapnap brings up his hands to his chest. “You hurt me, George.” He pushes his shoulder against George, a woeful expression on his face, and yelps when George pushes back. He topples where stands, before catching his balance. “You suck.”

“Idiot,” George replies, adjusting his backpack. “Why are you here?”

“Me and Dream walk here together all the time,” Sapnap answers, looking at him with new interest. “Why are *you* here?”

George sighs, shoulders deflating. He could feel his will leaving his body. “We have to work on a project together.” He doesn’t elaborate on who “we” referred to; it was obvious enough by his visible distress.

Dream scoffs. “Don’t look too excited.”

“I hope we fail,” George says, and Sapnap laughs.

“Don’t be dumb,” Dream rolls his eyes. “Let’s go.”

George sighs once more, watching as Dream pushes open the door. Sapnap stays behind, bidding, “Bye-bye, George!”

“Shut up,” George miserably responds, and follows Dream to his car.

The car ride is mildly awkward.

There is a moment of silence as they both slide into their seats, Dream tossing his bag in the back, and George places his hands in his lap. Dream leans forward to turn on the radio, and a song George has heard a few times begins to play while Dream pulls the car out of the parking space.

George keeps his eyes ahead of them, refusing to skew them towards Dream, and accidentally be caught in the act. Neither of them make any move to make conversation, not until Dream suddenly prompts, “Do you have any ideas on what you want the project to be about?”

“Yeah,” George nods, gaze unwavering. Asphalt glides by in grey, and Dream slows down at a stop sign. “I wrote a few down.”

“Cool.” The car turns to the right, and Dream adds, “I thought of a few myself, so we can look at those, too.”

“Okay,” George replies, and chews on his lower lip.

He’s unnaturally nervous. Everything about this makes George jittery; Dream being next to him, going to Dream’s house, the fact they’d have to be alone for the next few hours— George might die, he’s sure of it.

His hands hold each other while Dream drives, and the rest of the ride is spent silent, both of them focused on the road, perhaps for part of the same reason. George desperately wishes this had been a three-person project. It would save the strange intimacy of being with only one other person in the room.

He somewhat wonders what Dream is thinking. He’s probably getting a kick out of this. He’s always liked seeing George in distress.

The car slows down, pulling into a driveway, and George lets out a breath.

“We’re here,” Dream announces, and unbuckles his seatbelt.

George follows in suit, feeling awkward as he takes Dream’s lead in pulling off his shoes by the door, taking the stairs up, and entering the first and only door on the left.

Dream’s room is typical of any high schooler.

It’s more decorated than George’s own room, and it has its own predictable amount of clutter, but it’s void of any stray socks and coffee mugs. There are posters plastered on a few walls, and a football on his dresser. A pair of beat up Nikes sit near the doorway.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Dream offers, gesturing to a made bed, and George gingerly sits on the covers, careful as he places his bag on the floor next to it. “Want anything to drink?” He takes off his hoodie and takes a seat across George, notebook and laptop in hand.

George shakes his head. “No, thanks.” He reaches down and pulls out his own notebook, as well as his book and folder. “I’d like to just get this started.”

“Sure,” Dream says. He flips to a page. “I already had an idea that I kind of wanted us to do.”

George pulls out his own page. “So did I.”

They stare at each other, before Dream says, “We should do mine.”

George frowns. “You haven’t even heard mine.”

“Well, you haven’t heard mine, either,” Dream returns. “Besides, I don’t need to read yours to know mine is better.”

The same arrogance George is familiar with spikes up, and he sends Dream a look. “Seriously?”

Dream shrugs. “It’s the truth. Here.” He hands George his notebook, directing him to a circled one, and it’s some subject on the totalitarian aspect of the book, and it’s a fine topic, really, George’s deals with the same thing, but he continues to frown anyway. “What?”

“You expect me to go along with it when you won’t even hear mine out?” George questions, furrowing his eyebrows. He drops the notebook onto the bed space between them. “Yeah, right.”



Dream rolls his eyes. "Let's see yours, then."

George refrains from jumping out the window as he passes his notebook to Dream, who chews on his lip absently while he reads through the brief review George had written for his subject; he had been thorough, intent on proving himself, even if he didn't have to.

"Yours is too obscure," Dream settles on saying, after staring at George's paper for a solid few seconds.

George crosses his arms. "Our topics are almost the exact same."

Dream shakes his head. "Mine is more specific. We wouldn't get marked down for it."

"Then we can make mine specific," George says. "Yours is unarguable; you have no evidence to support it. We would have no material."

"My bad for not supplying evidence, something that we're supposed to do *together*," Dream rolls his eyes. He places George's notebook next to his, both papers facing opposite ways.

George scoffs. "You cannot be the one to mention teamwork when you were about to just have me blindly follow *your* decisions. Don't be a hypocrite."

Dream frowns, but doesn't reply. He takes his notebook and faces both papers toward him, and his gaze dances between both. George doesn't move where he sits, irritation present on his face as he watches Dream.

It's silent as they both sit, and he's sure a minute or so passes, until Dream finally says, "We'll compromise."

George bites his cheek, unamused. "Wow, phenomenal idea."

"Don't be annoying," Dream replies easily, eyes still downward. Neither of them speak until Dream proposes, "How about we take my prompt, alter it a little, and then use your material? I'll write the thesis and all that, and then you can make the evidence fit."

George stares at him, and, for the first time, Dream looks a little sheepish, leaning back and resting on his arms.

"Fine," he forces out, no energy to properly argue, and Dream lets out a sigh.

"Fine," he repeats.

The next few hours are spent silently, and both of them are careful not to spark arguments or conversation, intent on getting work done. It's better when neither of them are speaking, George realizes. Maybe they'd be better off not speaking at all.

George gets a hefty amount of work done, in the amount of time he spends rewriting his paragraphs until they're the best he can provide, and Dream is entirely focused, eyes glued to his screen, and George knows better than to interrupt him.

When he's finished with the last thing on his list for today, he quickly shoots a text to Karl to pick him up, and when Karl alerts him that he's only a few minutes away, George makes sure to begin packing up.

Dream suddenly looks up from his screen, eyebrows furrowed. "You're leaving?"

“If I didn’t know better,” George says, unzipping his backpack, “I’d almost think you were disappointed.”

Dream pushes his laptop aside. “Shut up, I was just surprised. I assumed I would be giving you a ride home.”

George gives him an incredulous look. “Why would you be giving me a ride home?”

Dream shrugs non committedly. “I mean, I did drive you here.”

“Irrelevant,” he replies, and tugs on his bag as his phone buzzes once more. “My ride's here.”

Dream stands up from where he sits, and strides across the room to open the door.

He’s unnaturally polite when he says, “I’ll walk you out.”

(“– so frustrating, as if I’d just *let* him boss me around for the entire project!” George complains, hands gesturing wildly while Karl stops at a red light.

“That was a dick move,” Karl nods.

“And then he tried to lecture *me* on team work,” George huffs, “like he hadn’t just tried to take over. I don’t know who he thinks he is, but it’s unbearable. The only reason I hadn’t gone insane was because neither of us spoke for the entirety of the time.”

“That sounds,” Karl says, “incredibly boring.”

“It was,” George agrees. “But I’d prefer boring to whatever other option there is with him.” He leans back into the passenger seat, crossing his arms as he scowls. “He’s so arrogant. I don’t know why he expected me to just– go along with whatever he wants and take it, but I won’t stand for it.”

Karl hums. “Then sit.”

George doesn’t laugh.

“I don’t think you’re funny.”)

George groans at the sight of one new notification, the next morning.

### ***Dream***

*can u do after school Friday*

It is with great misery that George defeatedly replies, *Yes*.

In Room 308, as printed on the flier, there are approximately twenty-one students, twenty-two including him, and three of them look up when George steps in.

He feels like a stereotypical nerd, amongst these people. There are several desks pushed together in different groups, with chess boards between them and pairs of students submerged into their own

games. No one pays any attention to him, and he's almost tempted to leave immediately, before a girl appears beside him, and he jumps.

"Hi," she says. "You're jumpy."

George takes a look at her, and vaguely recognizes her from a week ago. "Hello," he says back, and when both of them keep staring at each other, he continues, "I'm here for— chess?" He sounds more unsure than he would like.

The girl nods eagerly. "This is a club for chess." She looks around, before, presumably, spotting what she had been looking for. "Here, hold on, we'll set you up with someone who's intermediate."

It's after a few moments that George finds himself across a guy in green glasses and a pink mustache, and neither of them have any time to exchange introductions before the game begins with no warning, and the girl that George still does not know the name of encourages, "Go, go! Timer's running."

George has no time to consider his moves before he moves a knight instinctually.

It's a quick game, one that George can barely recall, but he takes both rooks in the first three minutes, and calls check twice, and the game ends at fourteen minutes when the man suddenly calls checkmate.

"Good game," the girl says for the both of them, nodding, and then turns to him. "Not bad, Jerry. We should play sometime."

George shrugs. "Sure."

The next forty minutes fly by easily, and it surprises him how easy it is to get away with not speaking with anyone else in the club for almost thirty minutes of his time there. The girl directs him to different desks to play with different people, leaving no room for introductions, and George is thankful for it.

The girl, whose name George has given up on getting, after everyone else leaves, calls out a loud goodbye from across the room, and he meekly waves back as he packs up.

And, for some unknown reason, as he leaves the building, George finds himself oddly refreshed—tired, still, but happy, nonetheless. He had thought it torture when he had said he'd walk home, today, but he almost looks forward to it; the sky is still a clear blue, there are leaves on the side of the pavement, and he isn't as exhausted as he usually is.

He goes home, feeling strangely satisfied with himself.

Friday afternoon finds George in Dream's room, once again in complete silence as they do their individual work.

The air feels tense, and George isn't sure if he's imagining it. He attempts to focus on his own work as much as possible, ignoring the weird feeling in his stomach, but it keeps pressing, urgent, and he doesn't know what to do about it.

When George looks up from his laptop, Dream spares him a glance almost immediately, a tell-tale

sign that he had been already looking.

They stare at each other in silence, until George sighs. “What?”

“Nothing,” Dream responds quickly, too quickly, and George gives him a look.

“You’re wasting both of our time if you keep pretending it’s nothing,” he reasons. “What is it?”

Dream bites his lip as he eyes his screen, and George would almost call him nervous when he asks, “Can you look this over for me?”

George tries not to scoff, or perhaps immediately throws a meaningless jab into the air; they hardly ever resort to asking each other for assistance, aside from the casual question on a math problem from Dream, or maybe an inquiry on an English assignment from George.

And so, when Dream tilts his screen towards George, it feels like a sudden crack in the tension, and George bites his tongue.

“Let me see,” he says, and Dream mutely hands over his laptop without much complaint.

He can see Dream fiddle with his hands while George reads through his paragraph, frowning in concentration. He rereads a few parts, corrects a spelling grammar, and adds a comma, before handing it back.

“It’s fine,” he establishes, and when Dream doesn’t look convinced, he adds, “it’s *good*.” As he says it, he internally grimaces at his own words, as though it hurts him to compliment the other man. He hopes Dream doesn’t get an ego boost at it. “Leave it alone, Dream.”

At that, Dream relents, sighing as he moves on.

Afterwards, it’s easy to get started, and, to his surprise, Dream doesn’t steer them in direction. It’s as though Dream has reigned in his stubbornness, and George corrects him multiple times, and Dream still bites, but he takes the criticism to consideration anyway, until gradually softening, and George points out a grammatical error and isn’t hit with a generic, aimless insult.

It’s a balanced push and pull, and George finds himself relaxing, irritation ebbing away as they progress on the project. It’s different from how they usually function; they’re rarely ever working together, the same goal in mind with no competition. George’s yearning for death diminishes after some time, and he doesn’t jump when Dream’s hand brushes against his arm.

Dream’s usual bossiness peaks out, however, when he suddenly decides, “I’ll make the slide show.”

“What? Why?” George turns to look at Dream, who opens up his laptop.

“Because,” Dream says, “you’re colorblind, and the last time we had solo presentations, all your slides were random colors, and it looked incredibly ugly.”

George throws a stray pen at Dream. “I was trying to make it look fun!” He lets Dream take on the task anyway, and, after a moment, he pauses. “How do you know I’m colorblind?”

“You mentioned it in, like, freshman year,” Dream responds distractedly, typing away. “We had an art class together, and your sun was green.”

“Oh,” George replies, blinking. He hadn’t expected Dream to remember anything about him, much

less something so obscure.

Now that he properly considers it, he doesn't think he knows many things about Dream, outside of the few facts that had been given over the years.

He knows of Dream's favorite color, and the fact he was an avid health freak, courtesy of Sapnap's complaints, but outside of that, George had no clue what kind of person Dream is when they weren't competing in every class.

He looks up from his paper, and quickly glances at Dream.

Dream's eyes are trained on his laptop's screen, yet George looks away immediately, too aware of his own actions. It feels embarrassing to be looking at Dream in such a casual way, despite the fact that, at this point, they were forcibly acquaintances, at most. Definitely not friends, with how they know practically nothing about each other.

He pauses.

George picks up his pen again.

He doesn't know why he cares.

(When George arrives home, strangely exhausted and body aching for no discernable reason, he collapses into bed, burying himself into his mattress.

His insides feel oddly twisted, as if he'd swallowed vines and thorns alike, and he frowns at the feeling, vaguely inspired to go eat an early dinner. Perhaps that was the reason.

Even so, as he finds himself shoving spaghetti into his mouth, it feels like a badly written excuse. George's eyebrows knit together at the thought of it, and he pushes it away. Maybe it was just the strange reality of working together with Dream, of all people.

It still makes him feel disorderly, and the fact it had gone *well*— that was even harder to wrap his mind around. It makes him wonder about things he doesn't want to.

Instead, he shoves more spaghetti into his mouth, and thinks about anything else.)

The next time George sees Dream, it is seven in the morning, and George is too tired to deal with him.

Sleepiness wears at him while George throws a textbook back into his locker, the sound of calculus hitting against the metal of the locker walls. His stomach growls, and maybe doctors were right about needing food in the morning. He doesn't know why he subjects himself to living like a starving Victorian child.

There's suddenly a presence next to him, and George doesn't spare them a look until a hand is in front of his face, waving for his attention. He squints at it, frowning, before turning to his left.

And, lo and behold, the bane of his existence retracts his arm, wearing a red varsity jacket and holding a sheet of paper.

George slowly stuffs his backpack into his locker, waiting, and when Dream doesn't speak, he bites the bullet.

"Can I help you?"

"I need to see your answer for number seven on the assignment from Ms. Piker," Dream says quickly, like he's ashamed to say it, and George stares at him. "I just want to know if I'm right or not," he adds, huffing.

George rolls his eyes, but brings out his folder anyway, digging through a few papers before he pulls it out. He hands the assignment to Dream, and watches as the other man compares the two sheets of paper.

Dream frowns. "You got a different answer."

"Then you're probably wrong," George shrugs, taking back his paper and tucking it away.

Dream shakes his head. "I'm pretty sure I'm right."

"Yeah," George begins flatly, "that's why you wanted to check your answers before turning it in."

Dream flushes, and George watches his cheeks turn pink, blush curling up to his ears, and he looks away before he thinks about it too much. "Shut up. I just wanted to make sure, but now you're confusing me even more."

He leans away from his locker as he shuts it, and holds his papers tight. "I doubt you've ever been correct in your life. My answer is right."

"Doubt it," Dream easily replies, and straightens where he sits. "I'm probably right. Bye."

"Definitely not," George calls, and Dream disappears around the corner.

He lets out a tired sigh as he turns around, and yelps when Karl suddenly appears, making his way through a McFlurry as he stares at George.

"What the fuck," George greets warmly, "you're like a cat."

"Meow," Karl says, because it's seven in the morning and George doesn't think he's spoken to a single sane person yet. "Good morning."

"Hi," he replies, and Karl moves to the side so they can walk together. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," Karl says through a mouthful of ice-cream and oreo. "You and Dream seem real friendly."

"Because he asked to double-check his work?" George questions, raising an eyebrow, and Karl shrugs. "I may be better than him in every way, Karl, but I'm not going to say no if he wants to see my paper real quick. I'm not an asshole."

"Debatable," Karl quips. "And, last I checked, you said you 'greatly disliked him'," he quotes, recalling one of George's many rants.

George blinks. "I do."

Karl blinks back.

“Okay.”

“Okay,” George echoes, and stops in front of a classroom. “Whatever. Bye, idiot.”

“Bye,” Karl sings, and George disappears into the room.

It’s during their shared class that Dream slides into the seat next to him and announces, “I was right.”

“What?” George says eloquently, until a paper is placed in front of him, with a marked *A* on the front, and a lack of any other marks. Memory of the morning earlier hits him, and he groans. “Oh my God.”

“*‘I doubt you’ve ever been correct in your life,’*” Dream mimics, voice unnaturally high, and George wrinkles his nose.

“I don’t sound like that,” he argues.

“*‘I don’t sound like that,’*” Dream says in the same, stupid voice, and George refrains from throwing a chair at him.

Neither of them mention it when George quickly pulls out his own paper, jotting down a few corrections, before handing Dream’s assignment back. Or, at least, neither of them say anything until Dream grins wide and says, “Now, what do we say when others help us with our work, George?”

“Fuck off,” George replies, and ignores the weird feeling he gets when Dream laughs.

“A sincere *thank you* would have sufficed, actually,” Dream says, and leans back in his seat. “You’re welcome, George.”

“Shut up,” he cleverly responds, and is saved from any further conversation when the lesson suddenly begins.

Unfortunately, it’s a little difficult to focus on whatever life George Orwell had lived when Dream is sitting next to him— it’s as though he’s buzzing with energy, begging for George’s attention while they sit with less than a foot between them.

He doesn’t know why it feels so weird, it’s not as if they’ve never sat next to each other before.

Well. George considers. Maybe it is, if his memory recalls correctly. Before this project, at least.

Perhaps that’s why it feels so strange, to pay just a little too much attention to every move Dream makes next to him— not in a *weird* way, but more in a way that George was half-heartedly making sure Dream wasn’t making a move to suddenly stab George in the gut.

Yesterday hadn’t been like this; he’d been too caught up in his work, but now, as they reviewed work he had done a while ago, he can’t find it in himself to submerge himself into the lesson, and is instead accidentally focused on the way Dream lightly taps his pencil against the page of the notebook.

His handwriting slants to the right, George notices, legible but rushed. He has a bunch of doodles in the corner, small blocks of writing that George can’t make out, alongside drawings of stars and

smiley faces and people.

George looks away. He feels invasive.

He turns to his own blank paper, and jots down the first thing he sees on the board.

After realizing he doesn't know anything about Dream, it's as if he's trying to learn everything, now. He doesn't know why he cares so much. Maybe it's because Dream had known something so insignificant about him, and George is trying to catch up, ever at the hand of his own competitiveness.

It's stupid. This is stupid.

He can't wait for the bell to ring.

There is some relief to be found when, on a fateful Tuesday, George walks into his English 12 class to find the desks arranged into neat rows, with no sign of them being required to sit next to their partners.

It also helps when Dream walks in later than usual, and, with no choice, is forced to sit across the room from George. Quackity sits in the seat in front of him and, although they rarely have the chance to speak during classes, Quackity takes today to his advantage to turn around in his chair and ask, "Do you have a pencil I can use?"

George raises an eyebrow. "Why? We aren't even writing anything right now."

"What are you, a cop?" Quackity replies, before snatching George's pencil off his desk. "I'm taking this."

George gets no chance to respond as Quackity quickly turns back to the front. He stares at his desk, and briefly mourns the loss of his pencil.

It's not as if it really matters at the moment, anyway. They weren't doing anything very mind-consuming at the moment, with the teacher now going through a presentation of George Orwell.

George would much rather be in his fifth period again; calculus is much more preferable to literature, as far as George is concerned, no matter how much Karl accused him of being a masochist. He'd always done better with numbers. Words were never his strong suit.

He, almost, in some strange way, almost wishes he and Dream were in the same math class. George had always beat him in competitions for the best score on a math test, and he knows Dream has never been a fan of numbers, much less calculus in his senior year of high school.

George frowns at a fleeting moment of self-awareness, as he realizes he's having thoughts about his mortal enemy— well, acquaintance, really, *friend*, if he keeps thinking about it, who is currently sitting just a few feet away from him. It's probably weird to be thinking about Dream.

It's not like having thoughts about Dream was an unusual thing— but it sounds weird when he words it like that. They were *rivals*, of course George would think about Dream from time to time. It's expected, really. He doesn't know why he's making a big deal out of it.

And, as if to prove just how Not Weird™ it is, George looks over at Dream. Just to see what the



other man is up to, at the moment.

George can barely hold back a visible reaction when he finds Dream already looking at him.

They stare at each other for a moment, and Dream's cheeks immediately redden. George has no time to process it all as Dream whips his head back to the direction of the board, pressing his lips together as he straightens his posture in his seat.

George furrows his eyebrows, and keeps staring. Half of him wonders if he had imagined the whole thing.

Surely not. George wasn't going crazy or anything, and he's caught Dream looking at him before, although he has never reacted to being caught like this. Still, his only affirmation that George hadn't been having delusions in the middle of his English class is when Dream glances at him again, before returning back to the front of the room.

George has no time to properly think about it when the bell suddenly rings, and Quackity twists in his seat to place his pencil back on his desk and chirps a cheerful, "Thanks!"

"Yeah, whatever," he mumbles back, looking up from his pencil, only to find Dream already out the door.

"I've, personally, never kissed a man," is the first thing George hears when he sits down, and he spares no thought to it as Quackity continues, "but I have gone snorkeling, and, at the end of the day, those are practically the same thing, so I'd like to say I know what I'm talking about."

Karl opens his mouth, before closing it, and then saying, "Those two things are just— incomparable. You're just *saying* things, neither of those even— what?"

Suddenly George wishes he had never gained the ability to hear. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Karl is in love with a man," Quackity immediately answers, and Karl makes somewhat of a screeching sound.

"I am not— *in love*, what is your problem? What," he exclaims, fork in hand, and George is almost afraid he might begin to attack Quackity with it, "is your problem? Do you get off on seeing people in pain?"

Quackity puts his hands up in surrender. "Whoa, there, pal, are you sure you aren't self-projecting here? Maybe you'd like to see Sap—"

Karl slaps a hand over his mouth, and George is suddenly hit with a case of déjà vu when he hisses, "*Don't* say his name."

George picks up his apple, taking a bite as he remembers, "You know, I haven't forgotten about you making fun of me for doing the same thing."

"That was in the past," Karl waves off, unflinching when Quackity licks his hand. "I'm a changed man. I've grown. Learned. Become a better person."

George stares at him. "It's been a week."

“Speaking of,” Karl decides to suddenly bring up, “how did the thing with him go yesterday? I didn’t get to ask this morning.”

Quackity looks between the two. “What ‘thing’? Did you and Dream finally kiss?”

“No, idiot,” Karl answers for him, while George tries to figure out whether to dwell on the *kiss* or *finally* part. “Him and George worked on the project together, yesterday.”

“Oh,” Quackity says, looking almost disappointed, and George would rather not think about that, and instead continues to eat his apple. “Well, I don’t want to hear about it, then. Your guys’ weird rivalry thing confuses me and I don’t understand why you guys can’t just kiss and make up.”

“Please stop talking about us kissing,” George finds himself saying, and inhales a deep breath. More and more self-help posts have been showing up on his recommendations. He wonders if it’s a sign.

“Who’s kissing?”

Mentally, George wonders if the universe was a sadist.

“No one is kissing,” George says with much assertiveness, sending both Karl and Quackity furtive glances as he turns to look at Dream. “What do you want?”

Dream slightly smiles. “Welcoming as ever, Georgie.” George resists throwing his milk carton at the other man. “I was wondering if you wanted to come over later. For the project,” he adds belatedly, after he realizes how it sounded. “I can give you a ride back after.”

“I mean,” George starts, lingering on the offer of a ride. “Alright. Sure, but you could’ve just texted me. You didn’t have to come over here.” He wasn’t even aware they shared the same lunch.

Dream shrugs. “I wasn’t sure if you would check your texts before then.” It makes sense, yet the slight darkening of his cheeks makes George suspicious.

“O-kay,” George says, drawing out the *o*. “I’ll be over, later, then.”

Dream nods. “Okay.”

George blinks at him. “Okay.”

They stare at each other for a moment, before Dream seems to realize he should walk away now, probably, and the three of them watch as he turns away and returns to his bustling table of friends, half of which consisted of people George has never seen.

“You guys are awfully friendly,” Karl comments once more, and George doesn’t like how it sounds.

“We are barely acquaintances,” George establishes, and stabs open his juicebox. “Our relationship is purely one of business.”

“‘Relationship’, huh?” Karl raises his eyebrows, and Quackity makes a face that George would rather not see.

“I wish we never met,” George proclaims, and, despite his words, Karl and Quackity grin widely.

Dream, George learns, is awfully talkative when he can't focus.

It's nothing like last time, when they'd barely spoken, except for the times when one of them found a problem with something of the other, or perhaps a complaint on their own part. Instead, this time, Dream is much chattier, prone to more whining, and George finds himself less annoyed than he expected himself to be.

"This sucks," Dream announces for maybe the thirtieth time, and George sighs as he looks over. "I wouldn't be in this situation if I lived in Greenland. I could be— farming ice, instead of this."

"Farming ice," George echoes, pressing his lips together to hide away a smile. "Really?"

"My destiny resides with the ice, George," Dream tells him, "you wouldn't understand."

George nods. "You're right, I don't." He looks away from Dream, lest he start *smiling*, or something equally atrocious. "Get back to work, idiot."

Dream salutes, like the loser he is, and George can't help it when he accidentally lets himself smile.

It drops immediately when he realizes what he's doing.

George feels vaguely off-kilter, recently. It's as though there has been a sudden switch flipped, because now Dream acts like they aren't just talking out of convenience for their project; he offers rides back home, laughs when George prods and pokes at his pride, and throws back insults that stray too far to hit home.

It gives him a headache. He doesn't know where this change in demeanor is coming from, and he doesn't particularly want to question it.

Sometimes he wishes he was more easy-going. He frustrates himself with his own tendency to overthink things.

George forces himself to focus on the paragraph in front of him.

Hours go by, and they're partially done with their project, only a few things left to do, when George looks outside and pales at the sight of darkness.

"What?" Dream questions, following his gaze. "Oh."

"I should be heading home, now," George says, dazed at the sudden lack of daylight. He stands up, brushing off nonexistent dust, and leans over for his backpack, packing things up. "Um, I have a thing tomorrow, so I can't, you know," he gestures passively, and Dream nods in understanding.

"That's fine," he replies, stretching. He sighs when he hears something pop, and slouches in contentment. It's silent as they both clean up, until Dream's stomach growls unnaturally loud.

George raises his eyebrows as he meets Dream's eye, who looks mildly embarrassed.

"Shut up," he complains.

"I didn't say anything!" George defends, a grin playing at his lips.

Dream shakes his head. "You didn't have to. You were thinking it."

“And how would you know that?” George questions, raising an eyebrow. “What are you, a psychic?”

Dream nods. “Yes, actually, I am.”

George gives him a look. “Really. Tell me what I’m thinking.”

“Fine,” Dream huffs, but there’s a slight smile on his face. “You’re thinking,” he begins, pausing as he hums, and pretends to think, “that you want to get dinner together on your way home.”

George squints at him. “Strangely, that is just not what I was thinking.”

“I can also tell when you’re lying,” Dream sing-songs, car keys jingling as he grabs them off his dresser. When George doesn’t respond, he insists, “Come on. I’m hungry. I bet you’re hungry. I want Thai food. There’s a Thai place on the way to your house. The answer is obvious.”

George chews on his cheek as he considers. Dream looks eager, and, unfortunately, Thai food has never sounded so appealing, after so many hours of only eating pretzels and celery, because, for some horrible reason, Dream did not own any food that wasn’t horrifyingly healthy.

Traitorously, his own stomach growls, and his face flushes.

Dream has a Cheshire grin when George looks at him. “George.”

“Dream,” he resignedly returns.

“Have dinner with me,” he says, and it sounds strangely friendly, because this is something friends do—*friends* bicker about getting dinner together, laugh about growling stomachs and insist on spending more time together.

George doesn’t dwell on any of this, for the sake of his own mental wellbeing.

“Fine.”

Dream lets out a loud cheer, both arms raised to the air, and he looks like an idiot, but George shoulders his bag and follows Dream out the door and to the car.

The night air is refreshingly cool, brushing cold against his cheeks, and there are no stars in the sky. George tries to spot the moon while he slides into the passenger seat.

“They’ve got great fried rice,” Dream mentions, twisting the key. “I had a phase where it was all I ate for lunch for, like, a whole week.”

“That sounds very unhealthy,” George comments. “Especially considering the fact that you’re a weird health freak.”

“I’m not weird for taking care of my body, George,” Dream rolls his eyes, and George finds himself stuck on his name in Dream’s voice, how he keeps saying his name, and he wonders if this is a Dream thing or if George is overthinking it.

George, like he does with many things, ignores it to instead say, “You’re still a freak.”

“I’m not a—*freak*, oh my God,” Dream says, and he has laughter in his voice, warm and honey-like and fond and it makes George laugh as well. “I’m not a freak. You’re a freak for eating dinner at four a.m.,” he mentions, a reminder of a previous conversation, and George tries to ignore how jarring it is, to almost feel like they were something akin to friends.

“I fell asleep, it wasn’t my fault,” George defends, and Dream takes a right where he usually takes a left, and the sight of various stores and restaurants fall into view.

Dinner together, George discovers, is more pleasant than it should be. It’s nice, to his dismay, and George finds himself enjoying eating a messy dinner together, in the parking lot of a Thai restaurant, in Dream’s car, with Dream next to him.

They briefly argued about paying, and it felt so comfortable, so natural, lightheartedly fighting about something so casual, something not serious, for once, and it makes the vines in George’s ribcage grow longer, thornier, wilder.

Dream, to his horror, had paid, despite the fact George had nearly climbed over him to give the cashier his card, and had, at George’s complaints, said, “You can pay next time.”

*Next time*, as if they were friends. George had wanted to leave the car at the words.

“Thanks for the dinner,” he says awkwardly, when they’re pulled up in front of his house, and Dream’s eyes are shining in the moonlight, and his smile shines as well, and Dream almost looks like the moon, sitting in the night like this.

He blanches at the thought, and snaps out of it when Dream waves off, “No problem. I had fun. Friday, right?”

George nods, and picks up his bag. “Yeah, Friday.” He steps away. “Thanks for the ride.”

Dream grins. “Anything for you.”

George scoffs, and, as he hurries up the steps into his house, he swears he can feel Dream’s eyes still on him.

George keeps seeing Dream everywhere.

Granted, George has always seen Dream everywhere; it was difficult not to, with his loud friends and his loud laugh and his loud presence and everything about him was *loud*, even if it was unintentional.

And, for some strange, strange reason, George will sometimes spot Dream, only to find him already looking back. He’ll wave, and George will take a second to make sure it’s really him that Dream is waving at, and then George will, begrudgingly, wave back, in order to not look like a complete asshole.

And, even stranger, Dream has begun approaching him.

It’s different from before, when they had only approached each other to brag, to wave their own accomplishments into each other’s faces, and perhaps this aspect is something that will never change, a grown habit over the years, but now, in *addition*, Dream has begun to approach him— just to *talk*. As if they were *friends*.

“Have you,” Karl carefully begins, “considered that you guys *are* friends?”

George, despite himself, laughs. “Don’t be ridiculous, Karl.”

Karl gives him a long, long look, before sighing.

George doesn't spare it a thought; he and Dream weren't friends. They couldn't be, not with both of their raging competitive streaks, the past four years of rivalry, and the fact that Dream was generally irritating.

Recently, however, George has discovered that, sometimes, for brief amounts of time, Dream wasn't as irritating.

Although they still consistently bickered, pushed their pride in front of each other, and George often fought the urge to hit Dream with a wheelchair, sometimes, it was fun, being able to push and pull so easily. It was easy. It was— almost nice.

“Everything you just described to me was friendship,” Karl interrupts. “Everything. Literally every detail. You like spending time with him, and you guys fight, but both of you know it isn't actually serious and it's funny. That is *literally* friendship.”

“That's stupid,” George waves off. “I still can't stand him. He's just nice to be around when he isn't being a dumbass. And, on rare occasions, he's funny. Also good company when I want someone like him around, and—”

Oh.

This begins another crisis that George pretends doesn't exist.

Chess club is delightful.

More than delightful, and although George leaves feeling a little exhausted, he now knows more of the student population and has somehow made friends, despite being mildly awkward, as a result of his socialization skills immediately turning off after sixth period.

Unfortunately, it seems his brain cells have also turned off, because he had forgotten that it planned to rain today. At least he has an emergency umbrella in his locker.

It was a long walk home. George would rather walk home without an umbrella than ask for a ride home from people he barely knows.

“George?”

He startles at the voice, jumping where he stands, and looks away from the drowning parking lot to find Dream at the doorway.

George blinks. “Hello.”

“What're you doing here?” He questions, clutching his bag over his shoulder, and he tilts his head at the question.

“I was,” George begins, “participating in a club.”

Dream raises his eyebrows. “Really? What club?”

“None of your business,” George decides, and shifts where he stands. He couldn’t turn around and begin walking home, now. Not with Dream still staring at him. Not when he’s smiling at George. Not right now. “Did you need something?”

“Not really,” Dream shrugs, walking forward. George doesn’t like being reminded of their height difference, and especially not when Dream being taller was brought on so obviously at moments like these. There is a moment of silence when neither of them continue to converse, before Dream asks, “Do you have a ride home?”

George wills himself not to flush. “Why?”

Dream looks at him. “I don’t know if you noticed, but it’s pouring out.”

“Really,” he dryly replies, turning to glance at the thick sheet of rain in front of them, “I had no idea. Brilliant observation.”

“I am quite brilliant,” Dream nods, the corner of his lips quirking upward, and George clears his throat and looks away. “I appreciate the flattery, George-o, but seriously, do you have a ride?”

“What does it matter?” George asks, a slight frown as he returns his gaze to Dream, who already stares back.

“Because there’s no way I’m letting you walk home in,” he motions toward the forming storm, “*that*. You’ll, like, die.”

George’s frown deepens. “I won’t *die*,” he argues, although it’s true that he would end up with a cold, at the very least. He’s sure his umbrella would prove a valiant fight from the pouring rain, but George is bound to get drenched, with or without the umbrella.

Instead of taking the cue to spiral into another meaningless debate, Dream says, sincerely, “Let me give you a ride home.”

George blinks. “I live thirty minutes away.”

Dream shrugs, pulling out his car keys. His cheeks pinken for some unknown reason, and he replies, “Okay. Is that a yes?”

George narrows his eyes, skeptical. “This isn’t some ruse to get me alone and violently murder me, right?”

“As if I’d ever admit to that,” Dream replies, and George scoffs. “Of course not, George. I am simply attempting to be the gentleman that I am.”

“You’re no gentleman,” George immediately denies, rolling his eyes. A moment passes, and Dream waits for a proper answer, before George bites his cheek and says, “A ride home would be appreciated.”

Dream grins. “That’s all you had to say.”

The car ride is easy— there is no tense silence, no fumbling for the aux while one of them chooses a generic playlist to listen to for the next thirty minutes, careful avoidance of eye contact while they pretend they aren’t in the same car.

Dream puts on an easy pop song as they buckle in, and George immediately insults his music taste.

Afterwards, it's smooth sailing, the steady thump of the rain accompanying them as Dream follows the directions from the GPS, windshield wipers working overtime. The noise of it all makes it easier to breathe, as though George isn't alone with Dream.

Dream, on his own part, is as insufferable as ever, but he doesn't take the bait as George attacks him like he's always done. It feels less serious now, as if George could insult Dream's pride, and he would smile the same infuriating smile he has been sending George recently.

It's— pleasant. It's *nice*. It's confusing, and it makes George nervous.

He exits the car feeling warm, under his skin and in his ribs, and he says, "Thanks for the ride."

"Anything for you, George," Dream replies, overly cheesy, and he's joking, *obviously*, but his smile is sweet and sincere and George stares at him before he abruptly closes the car door and hurries inside.

George is pretty sure they're friends now.

He's never had too many issues befriending others, but Dream was a special case; in the dynamic they had set up, it would be more than reasonable if they hated each other deeply, and yet, in some twist, Dream was now acting as if they had been friends for *years*.

It confuses him more than he'd like, but, quietly, behind the left side of his chest, he finds that he doesn't particularly— mind. He doesn't mind.

George frowns at the thought.

He's not *against* being friends. It would be convenient, even, seeing as they always manage to keep bumping into each other, in the halls and in calls and being paired together in group projects.

And, if the past few weeks have proved, being Dream's friend was— nice. It was nice, he can admit it. He prefers it to the spiteful rivalry they had held up before, exchanging it for a looser, easygoing competition.

Even so, the weird twisting feeling in his stomach— he isn't sure if that's friendship.

It's nothing like the feeling he had when they were only rivals, instead festering bigger over the course of the weeks, when they had grown from petty arguments to whatever situation they had now.

Now, Dream makes him laugh, and already stares when George looks at him, and blushes a little too easily, and doesn't seem to mind when their arms bump from time to time, and still brags, but it's less arrogant, and gives George rides home when Karl can't, and still calls him stupid nicknames like *Georgie* and *George-o*, and— George finds that he doesn't mind it at all.

It's two days before their presentation that Dream asks him, "Are you going to go to the game on Friday?"

George looks up from where he had been on the ground— too many of their conversations happen when he's lying on the hallway floor, he's realizing. He doesn't know how they keep ending up here.



Some of Dream's hair falls in front of his face when he looks down at George, eyes jumping from George's eyes to his arms to the rest of his body, curiosity to how in the world George is comfortable on the tiled floor. If they weren't rivals anymore, George can confess— Dream was popular for a lot of reasons. Being attractive— well. Maybe that was one of them.

“Why would I,” he inquires from the floor. George has attended two (2) football games in his life, mostly to cheer Sappan on. Dream has never seriously invited him to a game.

Dream shrugs with one shoulder. “It's our last one of the season. I was hoping to see you there.”

George presses his lips together in thought. “Okay.”

Dream's eyes widen as he visibly brightens. “You'll come?”

“Yeah,” George says. If they *were* friends, it was the least he could do, attending the last game of the season.

Dream looks all too relieved, as if he had been nervous, and his grin is unabashed as he looks down at George. His eyes scrunch up at it, cheeks pushed upward, and he looks a little bit like the sun, George notes.

“I'll look for you in the stands,” Dream decides as he begins walking away, voice echoing off the walls when he calls, “You better be there!” George tilts his head up to turn and watch him leave.

“I said I would,” George returns, rolling his eyes, but there's a small smile when he lets his head drop back down on the ground.

Weird feelings aside, George decides, they're friends.

They receive an A on their presentation.

George isn't surprised; they had finished four days before, and had plenty of time to adjust and revise bits that were questionable. Their slideshow had gone swimmingly, and it was easy to sit back down at his desk and feel satisfied with himself.

Dream high-fives him when they walk out of class together, and when their hands meet, Dream clings on, slotting his fingers between George's, who freezes where he stands, staring at their hands.

“What,” he says blankly, and Dream laughs.

“We nailed that,” he tells George. “I don't want to jinx it, but we *definitely* aced that.”

George shrugs. “It'd be funny if we didn't.”

Dream pauses. “What, you don't think we did well?”

“No,” George shakes his head, “I just think it would be funny if we failed after you say that.”

Dream rolls his eyes, tugging on their hands, and George is suddenly pulled forward, and he doesn't know how he ended up here, holding hands with Dream in the middle of the hallway, the cuff of his varsity jacket brushing against George's wrist, and his hand is warm, and George is pretty sure his face is an unnatural shade of pink.

“You’ve got Ms. Piker next hour, right?” Dream questions, and George nods, lost. “You guys are just watching a video, and she passes out an assignment, but it’s extra credit, so if you,” he waves his free hand, “happened to be absent, you wouldn’t miss much.”

George raises an eyebrow. “Why do you say this like I’m about to miss class?”

“*Because*,” Dream continues, and he continues to drag George in the opposite direction of his class, “we just finished a very important project.”

George blinks. “So?”

“*So*, we should celebrate a little,” Dream says, and abruptly pauses in front of the door to the parking lot. George glances at it, before turning to Dream, who sends an innocent smile his way. When George’s unamused face doesn’t waiver, he tries, “Come on, it’ll be fun!”

“Right,” he replies. “And where would we go?”

“Ice-cream?” Dream suggests. “Or we could go watch a movie, or— anything you want, really. I’m up for anything you want.”

George tries not to flush, Dream looking too intently at him, and instead of proposing any place at all, he says, “You’re a bad influence.”

Dream widens his smile. “Loosen up, Georgie.”

“This is stupid,” he adds, and, after brief consideration, turns to push the door open.

Dream cheers beside him, raising their linked hands as he hurries them toward his car. “We’re gonna have so much fun, and we’re going to hold hands and eat ice-cream and drive around and *kiss* and—”

“What is wrong with you,” George groans, pink in the face, and Dream only laughs, dropping their hands to get into the driver’s seat. George sits beside him. “You’re— so strange.”

“You like me,” Dream says. George’s mouth runs dry when he tries to refuse.

“You’re an idiot,” he settles on instead, and Dream grins.

They get ice-cream together, and George pays before Dream has the chance to open his mouth. The cashier pretends not to notice as they bicker over it, and slides forward their cups of ice-cream. Both of them shut up when they have ice-cream in their mouths.

They eat on the hood of Dream’s car, and the weather is warmer than expected, and it’s much more preferable to sixth period, and George wouldn’t mind if they did this much more often.

“Aren’t you glad you skipped to hang out with me?” Dream questions, smiling like he already knows the answer, and George resists the urge to lean over and do something stupid.

“As far as I recall,” George begins, “I was *coerced* into joining you. This is entirely against my free will.”

Dream scoffs. “That’s why you paid for our ice-cream.”

George pushes at him, hand raised, and Dream doesn’t miss a beat when he raises his own hand to

link their fingers again and– George lets it happen. Dream tilts his head, smiling still, and George squints at him.

“Why do you keep,” he gestures to their hands, “doing that?”

Dream looks up from his ice-cream to raise an eyebrow. “Do you mind?”

George chews on his inner cheek as he considers, before he shoves a spoonful of chocolate into his mouth and ignores the question. His hand remains where it is, and maybe that is answer enough.

“Actually,” Dream suddenly speaks up, when they’re nearing the bottom of their cups, “I was wondering.”

George turns to look at him properly.

“What?”

Dream is already looking back.

“We’ll still– hang out after this, right?”

George stills where he sits, spoon frozen in his grip, and he opens his mouth.

He hadn’t expected the decision to be in his hands; he had thought it would be an unspoken choice on Dream’s part, and George would have to deal with either outcome. Dream putting the choice in his hands makes him think too much about it.

George makes sure he doesn’t overthink it when he asks, “Why wouldn’t we?”

Dream, like before, looks relieved, shoulders deflating where they had risen up. “I don’t know, I was– I don’t know.” He shrugs, before sitting up straight, suddenly looking much more alive. “I can’t wait to be a horrible influence on you. I’m going to force you to hold my hand *all* the time.”

George shakes his head, hoping he isn’t pink again. “Don’t be an idiot.”

“I can’t help it,” Dream sighs, dramatic, “I always seem to lose my train of thought whenever you walk in the room.” It’s flirtatious, it’s a *joke*, yet George can feel his chest stutter.

He represses the feeling. “Are you sure that isn’t just your lack of a brain?”

Dream involuntarily laughs, leaning over to press his palm against George’s shoulder. “Shut up before I make you.” At George’s expression, he flushes. “I didn’t mean– oh my God, shut *up*.”

George laughs despite himself, leaning forward, and his stomach does some sort of acrobatic flip when Dream leans closer, too, so close, George can feel a puff of breath when he chuckles, too, flustered.

“You did that to yourself,” he points out, and Dream *tsk* s.

“I just didn’t realize how dirty your mind was.”

George rolls his eyes, looking away. He can still feel Dream’s eyes on him, and he finishes his ice-cream up, ignoring the feeling.

They clean up, throwing their trash away in a nearby trash can, and hurry back into the car. Music still plays faintly from the speakers, and Dream begins to drive in the direction of George’s house.

“This was fun,” Dream announces when he turns onto George’s street. “I’m happy we did this.”

“Sap,” George says.

Dream rolls his eyes. “I know you had fun too, even if you won’t admit it.”

George can’t find it in him to argue, and instead sighs, long and content.

It’s Thursday, and George is conflicted.

He’s only just mentally established that yes, he and Dream are actually friends, and now Dream acts *weird*, with his consistent, off-hand comments, too many that have to do with kissing George and holding his hand and other things that George is quite sure were strictly Not Platonic Things.

George can’t even begin to explain himself, and the fact he has not at all discouraged Dream’s behavior, and, in a way, if he lets himself be honest for just a second, he’d say he doesn’t mind. He likes this new shade of dynamic they have, even if it makes his stomach feel like it’s been hit with a frying pan.

The football game is tomorrow, and George is oddly nervous at the thought of it; he doesn’t know why it seems to matter so much, why he had nearly twisted his heart into two when Dream had asked him to come, when Dream had said he would be looking for George in the bleachers.

It’s giving him a headache, just thinking about it all.

“You’re thinking too much.”

George looks up from the chess board, where the girl sits across from him, staring at him.

He blinks at her. “Excuse me?”

“You’re thinking too much about it,” she repeats. “If you think too much, you’re going to run out of time.” She gestures to the timer beside them, where George has a solid minute less than her, and he hurriedly moves a rook.

They’re one of many players in the room, another club meeting, and there’s sparse chatter in the air, everyone too caught up in their own games to speak. Their voices are quiet, the girl’s volume unnaturally low when she talks.

“Isn’t the entire point of chess to think about your move?” George asks, and the girl shrugs.

“Are you really thinking about your moves, Jonathan?” She returns, and George bites his cheek. She’s got him there.

“Maybe I am,” he challenges, and the girl doesn’t seem to believe him for a second, but doesn’t reply, moving her bishop to catch a pawn. He slides his knight over, and steals her bishop.

“Check.”

The girl bites her lip as she thinks, the timer ticking, and she moves her queen.

“Checkmate.”

George scowls, leaning back into his chair. “Go again?”

They rearrange their pieces again, lining up their pawns, and when the girl places his rook for him, she says, “This time, John, don’t think too much. You’ll run out of time.”

George places down his rook, and accidentally bumps into a pawn. “I didn’t lose to time, last round.”

The girl shrugs again.

“You might this time.”

George does not know anything about football.

He supposes he should have asked someone, quite literally *anyone*, to give him a quick rundown on the rules beforehand, but he’s lost both Karl and Quackity, and Sapnap and Dream were literally the ones on the field, so he’s sat, clueless in the bleachers as everyone else cheers around him.

He has something to be glad for, George thinks, when the game finally ends, and he’s pretty sure they won, with the bright 23 next to *Home*. The crowd around him surrounds the stairs, eager to leave, and he waits a few steps behind, lest he get crushed in the moving tide of people.

The night sky is blank, a vast sea of black, the stadium lights outshining any stars, and it’s a little sad of a sight. Even so, the moon peers by, barely shadowed behind a few grey clouds.

“You came!”

George jumps, startled, and whips around to find Dream, in all his sweaty glory, beaming brighter than any star or stadium light. He moves as if to hug him, before George hurries away.

“Absolutely *not*,” George articulates. “You’re all sweaty and you smell,” he makes a face, “bad.”

Dream sighs in disappointment, letting his arms drop. “You wound me,” he expresses, despair on his face. George gives him an unamused look, and Dream smiles despite himself. “I’m happy you came.”

George shrugs, ignoring the beat of something in his chest. He’s pretty sure it’s his heart. “I didn’t know what was going on, but I’m pretty sure you did good. Congratulations, I think.”

“Thanks,” Dream replies, inching closer, eyes scrunched upward. “I waved at you earlier, but I, um. I don’t think you saw.”

“I did,” George says. He’s sheepish when he adds, “I wasn’t sure if you were waving at me.”

Dream tilts his head. “I was.”

“Oh.” George brings up a hand to the back of his neck. “Well, then. Hello.”

“Hi,” Dream returns, looking amused, and then he leans back, and George feels a whirlpool in his stomach. “Are you going to stick around any more, or?”

George shrugs. “I don’t know where Karl nor Quackity are, and I’ll probably just walk home. I’ll leave whenever.”

“Okay.” He seems hesitant when he slowly mentions, “I’m going to go take a quick shower, but,

um, I'll see you in, like, ten minutes?" Dream sounds hopeful, more hopeful than he should, and George finds himself nodding.

"Sure."

Dream nods. "Okay. Ten minutes."

George turns away as Dream hurries off to wherever football players go after games, and walks over to the stairs. Popcorn and soda and various snacks litter the metal floor, and he grimaces at the sight, careful not to slip as he makes his way down.

The majority of people have already left, and it's much quieter already. Even with the sudden change in population, George still can't spot either of his friends, and he accepts the fact they had left him to defend himself.

There are leftover coaches and teachers and a handful of cheerleaders lingering, as well as a few others nearing the exits and the field. He feels tired, despite the fact that all he had done was sit for the past few hours.

He leans against a nearby gate, where sparsely no one is around, and pulls out his phone as he waits. Multiple friends had been here, as posts would suggest, yet George doesn't spot a single one. It's strange.

Sapnap is also nowhere to be seen, and, George realizes, he is very alone.

"Why're you all the way over here?" Dream questions, where he suddenly appears to the right, and George, thankfully, doesn't jump this time.

"I was just walking around," George answers, turning to look at him. "Where is everyone?"

Dream shrugs. "Most of the team went to get food to celebrate, and everyone else went home. Pretty sure Karl went with Sapnap."

"I figured," George says, eyes stuck on Dream. His hair is wet, curling where it sticks to his forehead, and George almost wants to lean close and brush it away. He keeps his hands close to himself. "Didn't you want to join them?"

Dream shrugs again. "Not really. I wanted to hang out with you."

George opens his mouth, before carefully closing it. "Oh."

He hadn't said anything funny, but it makes Dream smile anyway. He doesn't question it.

Dream shifts from one foot to the other. "D'you want to go get some food?" After a pause, he adds, "Preferably together?"

George tugs at his own fingers, and mentally counts to ten, before nodding. "Sure. Thai, again?"

"Great minds think alike," Dream quips, and leans over to link their hands as they begin walking.

George lets it happen, lets himself get tugged away, and finishes, "But fools rarely differ."

Dream hums as they approach the car. "Are we fools, George?"

George doesn't let himself look for a double meaning, and doesn't reply.

They eat a lot in Dream's car.

It's a fact he suddenly realizes when they're sitting in the car again, light music playing while they dine in their car seats. Despite the fact that most of Dream's friends are presumably hanging out without him, eating somewhere better than inside his car, he looks oddly content with eating Thai food with George in his car.

"I wish you explained how football works before the game," George says, watching as Dream shoves a knot of noodles into his mouth. "I was completely lost the entire time."

The corner of Dream's mouth quirks upward. "I kind of assumed you knew how it works, considering you were going to a football game."

George rolls his eyes. "You say that like I went there for the game."

Dream raises an eyebrow, and George internally groans at how he sounded. "Well, then, George, I'd love to know what you actually went for."

He lets out a withered sigh. "You're insufferable."

"I'm also the reason why you went," Dream grins, and George resists the urge to leave the car.

"Idiot," he says, and they stare at each other, and George adds, "you have sauce on your face. You look stupid."

"Shut up," Dream replies easily, swiping at the side of his cheek, and misses where the smudge of sauce is entirely. George directs him lower, and to the left, and, by some miracle, he still misses.

"Oh my God, this is frustrating," George huffs. "Come here."

Dream smirks when he leans forward, looking too eager when he lets George hold his chin and swipe away at the left side of his mouth. His eyes stay wide open, and George stares back, lest he accidentally look at something else.

"Got it?" Dream mumbles, frozen where he is.

"Yeah," he answers, voice suddenly raspy, and he clears his throat.

Neither of them move, and George knows he shouldn't stay, holding Dream in his palm, eyes falling dangerously low, but Dream doesn't move away, eyes staring somewhere on his face.

"Well?" Dream questions, looking up to meet his eyes.

George swallows. "What?"

Dream smiles. "Are you going to kiss me or not?"

*Oh*, he thinks, and then thinks, *I should kiss him*, and then, *but* –

He doesn't hear himself out, and instead leans forward.

Dream's smile melts away when George kisses him, grease and soy sauce on their lips, and it's quick and sweet and easy and George refuses to think at all when he pulls, and Dream pushes back, and he pushes, and Dream pulls.

It doesn't last long, yet George could bet he'd remember it for the rest of time, the lingering taste of Dream's noodles on his mouth, and George subconsciously licks it off his lips, and Dream grins at the sight.

"Tasted like soy sauce," Dream comments, and George wrinkles his nose.

"You're disgusting," he replies, and Dream laughs beside him, leaning back to rest his head against the window.

He looks good in the night, shining silver and gold. "We should kiss again."

George can feel his heart jump out of his ribcage. *Don't overthink it.*

Nonetheless, he still asks, "Why?"

Dream shrugs, looking nonchalant, but the slight stiffness of his shoulders gives him away. "I really like you," he answers, like it's easy, and maybe it could be.

"Oh," George responds smartly, and Dream tilts his head. "That's good."

Dream smiles. "Is it?"

"It is." George confirms, and he doesn't think about it twice when he says, "Kiss me again."

Dream sighs, jokingly worn out, but he leans forward anyway, a smile playing on his lips.

"Anything for you."

## End Notes

!!!! cycy made a little [comic](#) of this fic which is maybe the most accurate thing Ever !!!! go give it a look immediately :]

hi :D after an intense week of writing, a bunch of caffeine, and stress, i finally finished this  
!!!! i had wanted to end it at 10k, since that was a goal set by friends on twitter, but i felt it just . didn't seem completed just Yet

i know this fic is a little bit ? cliche perhaps but i hope u enjoyed it nonetheless

i dont know how i feel abt this fic yet, my only hope is that lilac likes this :] and hopefully everyone else did too !

as always, feel free to comment, kudos, and u can see me [here](#) or [here!](#)

thank u so much for reading !

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!